

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06

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FM AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6685

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN JOSE 1029

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PGOV, CS

SUBJECT: PRIMARY ELECTIONS IN COSTA RICA - THE JOSE FIGUERES ROLE

REF: A) SAN JOSE A-05, B) SAN JOSE A-10

1. SUMMARY: AS THE COUNTDOWN TO PRIMARY ELECTION DAY (MARCH 13) BEGINS, JOSE FIGUERES HAS UNEXPECTEDLY RE-ASSERTED HIMSELF AS A GOVERNMENT PARTY POWER STILL TO BE RECKONED WITH. HIS NEW ROLE: PARTY CONCILIATOR. END SUMMARY.

2. COSTA RICA IS GEARED UP IN PREPARATION FOR THE MARCH 13 PRIMARY ELECTION IN BOTH THE GOVERNMENT PARTY PLN AND THE OPPOSITION. FROM THE FIELD OF TWO IN EACH CAMP, ONE WILL EMERGE CANDIDATE FOR THE 1978 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION, WHICH IS 11 MONTHS AWAY. COSTA RICA IS APPROACHING THIS PRIMARY--THE FIRST IN ITS HISTORY--IN THE SAME TRADITIONAL CIVIC SPIRIT AS A PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION. ACCORDINGLY, IN THESE LAST DAYS BEFORE MARCH 13, THE COUNTRY IS LIVING AND BREATHING POLITICS (REFS A AND B).

3. FORMER PRESIDENT JOSE FIGUERES HAS MADE NEWS DURING THE PAST WEEK BY BREAKING HIS POLITICAL SILENCE

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(FOLLOWING FOREIGN MINISTER GONZALO FACIO'S DEPARTURE FROM THE RACE IN JANUARY) WITH A CONCILIATORY CALL FOR THE PARTY UNITY BEHIND WHICHEVER THE TWO PLN CANDIDATES EMERGES VICTORIOUS. ON NATIONAL TELEVISION MARCH 8 AND MARCH 10, FIGUERES URGED PARTY TO SUPPORT EITHER SECRETARY GENERAL LUIS ALBERTO MONGE (THE RECOGNIZED FRONTRUNNER IN THE RACE) OR EX-MINISTER

OF AGRICULTURE HERNAN GARRON. FIGUERES DESCRIBED THE POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES OF THE TWO AS LEFT AND CONSERVATIVE RESPECTIVELY WITHIN THE SOCIAL DEMOCRAT BQJ# POLITICAL PHILOSOPHICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE GOVERNMENT

PARTY, BUT UNDERLINED THAT NEITHER IS EXTREME IN HIS VIEWS. BY REFUSING TO ENDORSE EITHER ONE, AND CALLING FOR A FUTURE CO-GOVERNMENT OF THE IDEOLOGICAL TENDENCIES IN A 1978-82 PLN ADMINISTRATION, FIGUERES HAS PROJECTED THE IMAGE THE PARTY PATRIARCH WHO IS KEEPING HIMSELF ABOVE THE FRAY AND WHOSE ROLE IS CONCILIATOR. THIS CONTRASTS DIRECTLY TO FEARS IN THE GOVERNMENT PARTY THAT A DISGRUNTLED FIGUERES, WHO HAS BEEN POLITICALLY THWARTED WITHIN HIS OWN PARTY DURING THE LAST YEAR, WOULD SPLIT AWAY AND PRESENT HIS OWN CANDIDATE.

4. FIGUERES SAID HIS CONCERN WAS THAT THE WINNER WILL NOT SUPPORT THE LOSER OF THE PARTY PRIMARY. FIGUERES HAS PROPOSED THAT LOSING CANDIDATE BE PROMPTED A PROMINENT ROLE IN THE NOMINEE'S ADMINISTRATION, AND HAS EMPHASIZED THAT PARTICIPATION OF BOTH TENDENCIES IN THE NEXT PLN ADMINISTRATION IS THE KEY TO PLN UNITY. FIGUERES UNDERLINED HIS COMMITMENT TO PARTY CONCILIATION BY NOTING THAT HE IS MENDING FENCES WITH DANIEL ODUBER, WITH WHOM HE ADMITTED HE HAD BEEN AT ODDS IN THE PAST. FIGUERES DISMISSED CORRUPTION CHARGES BY SAYING HE FEARED NO INVESTIGATION.

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GATIONS, AND IN FACT WOULD WELCOME THEM.

5. COMMENT: COSTA RICA WAS WAITING FOR JOSE FIGUERES TO SAY SOMETHING ABOUT THE CURRENT POLITICAL SITUATION, AND ONCE AGAIN HE CAUGHT THE COUNTRY OFFGUARD. NO ONE EXPECTED HIM TO BE AS CONCILIATORY AS HE HAS BEEN. FIGUERES' MOVE IS A SKILLFUL POLITICAL PLOY TO RE-ESTABLISH HIS PRESTIGE IN THE PARTY, TO REASSERT HIS POSITION AS A PLN LEADER, TO KEEP DANIEL ODUBER ON NOTICE THAT HE IS STILL A POLITICAL POWER TO BE RECKONED WITH, AND TO MAKE HIS INFLUENCE AS CONCILIATOR FELT IN THE CAMPAIGN AND IN A FUTURE PLN GOVERNMENT. FIGUERES HAS DEMONSTRATED ANEW WHY HE HAS BEEN THE LEADING POLITICAL FIGURE IN COSTA RICA OVER THE PAST THREE DECADES.

KILDAY

NOTE BY OC/T: # AS RECEIVED.

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Message Attributes

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Sent Date: 11-Mar-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
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